DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 060 EA 016 580

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TITLE Vocational Education for Disadvantaged Learners.
INSTITUTION National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Va.
PUB DATE Mar 84
NOTE 8p.
AVAILABLE FROM Publications, National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091 ($1.00; quantity discounts; orders of $15.00 or less must be prepaid).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT National Association of Secondary School Principals Curriculum Report; v13 n5 Mar 1984

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Disadvantaged Youth; Heterogeneous Grouping; Mainstreaming; *Program Design; Secondary Education; Student Placement; *Vocational Education; Vocational Training Centers; Work Experience Programs

ABSTRACT

This report describes three common options for designing a vocational curriculum for special-needs students and then cites operating vocational programs that use each of the options. Mainstream vocational programs, which are modified to suit special needs, as well as self-contained classes and cooperative work-experience classes, are covered. Also noted are projects and centers providing vocational support programs in related disciplines. The projects cited as using various program options are described by their services and goals and are further identified by addresses and contact persons. (JW)

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Curriculum Report

Vol. 13, No. 5 March 1984

ED242060

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Vocational Education For Disadvantaged Learners

For much of its history, vocational education at the high school level has been forced into a defensive, apologetic stance. For years, students, their parents and some teachers looked down on the young people who chose to follow vocational programs as intellectually less able and as socially less desirable.

In an understandable attempt to counter this denigration, many schools have established selective academic requirements for admission to their vocational programs. A significant degree of inherent academic ability and developed competence are necessary for success in certain vocational education areas, so in some instances admissions requirements can be justified, but there has been an almost complete lack of school-based opportunities for disadvantaged learners to obtain vocational education.

The first major step toward bettering the lot of disadvantaged young people so far as vocational preparation is concerned was the Vocational Education Act of 1963. This Act called for the development of occupational skills for "persons who have academic, socioeconomic, or other handicaps that prevent them from succeeding in the regular programs of vocational education" (GPO, 1979).

Innovative as it was, this initial congressional action merely recommended. Subsequent legislation, however, was more specific and demanding. The Vocational Amendments of 1968 mandated that portions of the federal grants to the states be used to provide special programs or services to those who could not succeed in regular vocational education programs without such special assistance.

EA 016 580

For Whom?

Who, then, are these disadvantaged learners? What teachers and their associates see in the course of their everyday professional work are youngsters conditioned by backgrounds and out-of-school experiences that seriously reduce their chances of success in most customary school settings. They see students who have difficulty with reading and writing assignments, students for whom simple mathematical calculations may be impossible, and students who have problems comprehending written and oral assignments. Such students often become withdrawn or disruptive; they may display disrespect for others' property or authority, in school and out. Many of them are merely putting in their time, waiting to reach the legal age when they can join the dropout population.

For many high school students, these academic and other in-school shortcomings are the results of the serious socioeconomic and cultural handicaps with which they have been confronted in their out-of-school living. While a majority of secondary school people are aware of such handicapping conditions, a brief sampling of research reveals that trying to get along with a below-grade math score or a reading disability is likely to be only a part of the "special needs" of the vocational student we label "disadvantaged."

A most important caveat to observe when evaluating observations and planning vocational curriculum adaptations like those described in the next section of this *Curriculum Report* is: There is little evidence that disadvantaged young people are inherently less intelligent than are more privileged students; in planning vocational programs, "deficiencies" must not be confused with "differences" (Eisenberg, 1967; Pettigrew, 1966; Deutsch, 1963; Jensen, 1969). The schools have provided middle and upper income youth with the intellectual tools necessary for success in today's society, but they have generally failed to meet the challenge of educating the disadvantaged (Quinton, 1980).

Decisions To Be Made

Federal legislation and much state-level legislation stimulated by that national action provide the basic funding for improving vocational education for disadvantaged young people. But money is one thing; getting the job done is another. The task of giving practical substance to such legislative intentions is the responsibility of the entire educational community, and in particular, the men and women who plan, provide instruction, and administer vocational programs in local secondary schools and school systems.

Two fundamental questions a school or school system must consider, whether its next step is initiating, expanding, or maintaining vocational opportunities for its disadvantaged students, are:

- How can we most effectively determine the number and nature of students who might be classified as disadvantaged and, subsequently, might benefit from programs and services in vocational education?
- What classroom settings or teaching approaches in

vocational education seem to offer the most promise in aiding disadvantaged youngsters to reduce or overcome their handicaps?

Even if the need for new, increased, or continuing services for a school's disadvantaged students seems obvious, it is necessary to gather local data to support that belief and to provide the information required to design programs appropriate for students, both actual and potential. Furthermore, facts are essential to gain and/or maintain support for those programs from the school board, administrators, school staff, employers, community, and state agency that controls the allocation of vocational funds.

School people will quickly see what those data sources will be and the kinds of information they can provide, so only a most limited reference to them will be made here to suggest where to turn and what can be learned. For example:

- *Staff surveys*, including teachers, counselors, school psychologists, social workers, etc., help answer questions such as: Are there a significant number of students whose academic performance is negatively affected by the economic status of the family? Are there a significant number of students who are below grade-level in mathematics and reading ability?
- *Follow-up studies* of dropouts as well as graduates may produce information indicating a need to improve services.
- *Surveys and interviews with current students* to obtain information about the existing school program.
- *Community agency contacts* often will have information that can reduce the data-gathering demands on school personnel — for example, the number of low-income families in the school district or quantitative data on employment/unemployment rates for persons who do not graduate from high school.

Along with an established plan for assessing "special needs" of students who are entering or are considering doing so, the school needs a process for identifying and caring for young people whose disadvantages develop or surface during their years in that school. Because of the varied nature and extent of the disadvantages such screening will reveal, the subsequent curriculum planning should be a cooperative effort by a team of professionals with competences that match that "varied nature and extent."

Schools can use three options when putting their curriculum for special-needs students into operation. For some students the most appropriate alternative will be placement in regular vocational classes with additional support services provided. This is popularly referred to as "mainstreaming." Other students may function better in separate, self-contained classes which are specifically designed for disadvantaged learners. A third option is a cooperative education program which will allow students to earn school credit while getting work experience.

These three settings are not mutually exclusive; at any one time a school will have reason to use all three.

A Preferred Option

Most disadvantaged students will be able to function in the regular vocational programs in the school, and the content, goals, and objectives of instruction can be the same for them as for all other young people. However, the provision of support services is the most critical component of the mainstreaming approach. Support personnel already available in the school or school system are likely to include: remedial reading teacher, remedial math instructor, media specialist, school psychologist, personal and vocational counselors, school social worker, and librarians. It may be necessary to add one or two generic "special needs" teachers with backgrounds in vocational education.

The vocational instructor and guidance personnel have a responsibility to identify specific needs of disadvantaged students and then to seek out the necessary services to cope with them. For most students, the required instructional or procedural adaptations will not require a great deal of additional work or time on the part of the vocational instructor. However, if the support services are to be effective in a vocational setting, the vocational faculty must develop a cooperative instructional relationship with staff members who are available to help disadvantaged students reduce their academic and other handicaps.

Mainstreaming does have its limitations, and these must be taken into account in creating a comprehensive plan to provide vocational education opportunities for a community's disadvantaged youth. Among these are:

- Some students cannot be appropriately served in a regular classroom environment and may require more specialized help than what can be provided in the usual classroom context. For these young people, other options must be considered.
- Some students cannot benefit from participation in regular vocational classes because they are absent too frequently to profit from "mainstreaming" help. For them, a cooperative work experience option may be more productive.
- Many vocational teachers do not feel that they have been adequately trained to understand and give the specialized instructional assistance their disadvantaged pupils should have. Inservice education for the staff is obviously essential in planning and starting up a program of vocational adaptations for disadvantaged high schoolers. Professional "support services" ought to be continually available to classroom teachers as that program moves ahead.
- It is commonly thought that trying to help disadvantaged students in a regular classroom setting takes too much of a teacher's time, to the detriment of other students. Some additional time and effort by the teacher will probably be necessary, but most of this extra work by the teacher will be called for in the "start up" phase of the program; once the program is in place and teachers have acquired experience and confidence in handling classes that include "mainstreamers" along with the usual student enrollment, the additional demands on time will be minimal.

The advantages of mainstreaming as the basic approach in planning suitable vocational learning opportunities for disadvantaged students of secondary school age are substantial:

- The environment of the regular class allows the disadvantaged student to interact with a variety of other students. In most vocational classes, this environment simulates that of the real work world, and thus the students have the opportunity to experience an approximation of that work world prior to job placement. As a result, they will be better prepared to make a

successful transition from school to work.

- Many more students can be served through placement in regular classes with instructional support than if all disadvantaged students were to be placed in special, separate smaller classes.
- The supportive services and teaching techniques developed for disadvantaged students prove to be beneficial for many non-disadvantaged young people as well.
- Mainstreaming is thoroughly workable.

Exempli Gratia

DISADVANTAGED AND HANDICAPPED PROJECT, Sauk Area Career Center, 138th and Crawford, Crestwood (P.O. Robbins), Ill. 60472. *Contact:* Carolyn Stutrud.

The Sauk Area Career Center (SACC) is a public secondary school offering vocational training programs to juniors and seniors from about 10 high schools in the area. Students are transported from their home schools to SACC.

A special needs team of three resource teachers serves both handicapped and disadvantaged students who may be enrolled in the regular vocational programs offered at SACC. Disadvantaged students — two or more years below grade placement in reading, math, and writing skills — are given assistance as needed in their vocational studies.

Special needs teachers work cooperatively with vocational teachers and home-school personnel to provide supporting services as required in a student's specific vocational training program. Here are a few results of that cooperation:

- Reworking of material in simpler form, allowing students to concentrate on concepts rather than on the process of reading.
- Reference charts, which enable a student to concentrate on a new concept without being hampered by inability to recall or perform some other skill.
- Tape recorded text material.
- Non-reading substitutes for assignments.
- Remediation groups conducted for spelling skills needed in programs such as medical and legal office work.
- Materials and activities to reinforce the learning of needed basic math skills.

In addition to ongoing work with enrolled students, the special needs resource teachers conduct vocational evaluations for students in the home schools. When evaluation activities have been completed, disadvantaged and handicapped students who show promise of benefiting from vocational training are encouraged to enroll in appropriate programs at SACC.

SUPPORT SERVICES, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR DISADVANTAGED, Elkhart Area Career Center, 2424 California Dr., Elkhart, Ind. 46514. *Contact:* James Broadbent, vocational director.

The Elkhart Area Career Center Special Needs Program mainstreams disadvantaged and handicapped students into its 24 vocational training areas, which are half-day vocational secondary programs. The Center has served approximately 600 disadvantaged and handicapped young people through its Special Needs Program since its inception nine years ago.

The prime purpose of this ongoing Special Needs Program is to increase the rate of success of disadvantaged and handicapped students in completing their vocational training at the center and then in finding placement opportunities, either in a job or in advanced training.

The objectives of the program are:

- To provide remedial instruction in identified math and reading deficiencies related to students' vocational instruction programs
- To provide prescriptive diagnostic treatment plans for disadvantaged and handicapped mainstreamed students who received a "D" or "F" evaluation at any grade break
- To provide inservice workshops for the classroom teachers and technical assistants at the center
- To provide intervention strategies such as contract writing, home visits, phone calls, and more one-on-one and group work with students for crisis intervention
- To provide testing and assessment services
- To provide placement services for employment or further training.

PRE-INDUSTRIAL PREPARATION, Hawaii School District Occupational Development and Student Services Branch, 941 Hind Iuka Dr., Room 23, Honolulu, Hawaii 96821. *Contact:* Lawrence A. Inaba, educational director.

This program is designed to help those individuals in high school who are identified as academically deprived to improve their basic verbal, scientific, and mathematical skills. Instructional support in these essential skills is correlated with the concrete occupational experiences students have in their vocational classes.

For example, when students in the metals and technology program are learning to fabricate aluminum duct work, the math class helps them to work with decimals, fractions, and geometric problems in producing blueprints and drawings; their science class study of air flow and air pressure is interwoven with their study of the design of the product, and the specifications of the product can be written out in English class and reported on orally.

Job tasks and skills are very much a part of this program since occupational experiences are the basic means to the end. Occupational learning experiences are directed by teachers with vocational competencies, and the academic skills development is the responsibility of the various subject-matter teachers.

The most important feature of this program, though, is that all teachers who are involved in it, together with counseling and guidance personnel, work as a closely coordinated professional team in the school.

For Others, Another Choice

Mainstreaming in regular vocational classes will not be effective for some disadvantaged young people. For example, some will not be interested in the regular curriculum and for that and other reasons will be ineffective learners in that environment in spite of the efforts of the special needs staff and others. For such students, a self-

contained classroom approach may be better.

In this pattern, one or two teachers work with a limited number of students in a very personal and individualized way. They provide needed instruction in the basic skills, but also give attention to such matters as career exploration and orientation, employability, and general academic skill development. An intensive, individualized program designed for each student is directed toward what will be, for him or her, realistic career development. It is based on activities that have an obvious relationship to that student's growth.

Enrollment in a self-contained classroom group is not expected to be long-term; length of participation should depend on the individual student's progress. Hence, it is important to maintain flexibility in programming the classroom so that students can move to alternative settings — existing vocational classes, cooperative work experience assignments, the regular academic curriculum — whenever they are ready.

The possible shortcomings of a self-contained classroom learning environment for some disadvantaged students in vocational programs include:

- The atmosphere of the self-contained classroom may provide so secure and sheltered an environment for some students that they will be inclined to overstay their needs unless deliberate steps are taken to reintegrate them gradually into regular school classes.
- Some students may not want to participate in this program because it appears to them to be a "special" class, and being in it might subject them to ridicule by other students.
- The "self-contained" aspect of this option may remove students, at least during school hours, from contact with their peers who could serve as role models for appropriate behaviors.

Exempli Gratia

PRE-VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS, Cottonwood Center, 911 Mountain Cove, Boise, Idaho 83702. *Contact:* R. LaMont Royter, coordinator.

This Pre-Vocational Project, now in its ninth year, originated at Hillside Junior High to reduce the dropout rate of students who were not succeeding in regular school programs. The program has since expanded to include students from all six area junior highs.

Typical students come from single-parent homes, are on welfare, and are exposed to or involved in alcoholism and/or drug abuse. Their school histories show a high incidence of absenteeism; they are low achievers or anti-achievers, failing in two or more classes with low basic skills in reading, writing, and math; and they intend to leave school at 16 years of age or soon thereafter.

These students have problems so severe that removal from the regular school environment is believed to be in the best interest of all concerned. Therefore, the project is best implemented as a separate program. In a non-threatening, loosely structured school environment, students are provided learning experiences through practical, hands-on projects in 24 areas, small-group discussions, field trips, films and filmstrips, guest lecturers, and work-study experiences.

Expectations for each of the 24 areas are carefully and realistically stated. To illustrate:

- Upholstery: The student will be able to make necessary repairs to framework, retie springs, refinish wooden parts, and recover simple style chairs and sofas.
- Fast Foods: The student will be able to operate grill, fryer, and dishwasher, take orders, serve customers, operate cash register, and prepare all items on the menu.

When working with these special-needs students, the teacher's objectives are multi-level: imparting knowledge of a subject field; exposing students to a variety of career possibilities; helping them develop positive attitudes and life styles; and acting as adviser and counselor to troubled students.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM, Lehigh County Vo-Tech School, 2300 Main St., Schnecksville, Pa. 18078. *Contact:* Joseph G. Rothdeutsch, director.

The Alternative Education Program (AEP), sponsored by LCVTS, is a three-year comprehensive program offered to selected high school students. Students experience a broad array of training programs at Vo-Tech, at community non-profit organizations, in business and industry, and in various construction trade areas. Along with the vocational program, students attend an academic program, which includes all subjects required for graduation.

AEP is an "alternative" way for students to earn a high school diploma. Instructors, aides, and counselors help students develop occupational skills by providing an individualized, personal approach to learning. With the help of this program, an AEP graduate can meet working demands, prepare for the job market, acquire job-seeking skills, and secure full-time employment.

The two major vocational components of the AEP curriculum are Construction Trades and Diversified Training. In Construction Trades, students develop occupational skills in carpentry, masonry, electricity, building maintenance, and painting. In Diversified Training, they have an opportunity to acquire skills in 10 occupational areas: animal caretaking, automotive service, building maintenance and grounds keeping, child-care/educational assisting, clerical, food service, institutional housekeeping, nursing aide, printing/graphic arts, retail sales, and merchandise handling.

Off-campus training stations agree to provide supervision and training, while students agree to meet certain individual and training responsibilities.

The Co-op Way

The third option, cooperative work experience, provides vocational learning experiences that are not usually a part of in-school programs and/or that can be provided more effectively in an on-the-job setting. The first-hand, supervised employment situation characteristic of a co-op approach can be particularly helpful to disadvantaged young people who have records of recurring failure in school and out. But for this very reason it is essential to understand that a quick shift from all-school to a school-job combination can be disastrous for some of these students;

a change is not always therapeutic. Working first in an in-school training station that approximates some out-of-school requirements may be a necessary preliminary step to co-op job placement for some special needs students.

Operating a co-op program for any student group has its problems — locating interested employers, obtaining quality teaching and supervision by employers, transportation and scheduling demands, for instance — and these are likely to be more serious in trying to maintain on-the-job learning connections for many of the young people we are concerned about in this discussion. However, it is worth the effort.

Exempli Gratia

VOCATIONAL EXPLORATION, EXPERIENCE, AND TRAINING, Dayton Board of Education, 348 West First St., Dayton, Ohio 45402. *Contact:* Alberta M. Minor, coordinator.

Project VEET is a vocational program that offers a wide diversity of occupational training for economically disadvantaged high school youth from five targeted schools. The project is a cooperative effort by the Dayton Board of Education and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and operates at Wright-Patterson.

Training is provided in seven occupational clusters: clerical, health, food service, trade, child care, warehousing, and industrial maintenance. A planned curriculum is provided for each cluster. In addition, for each individual student a curriculum plan is created that specifies what that student is to do and learn, determines the desired outcomes of learning, and designs means of reaching those outcomes. Related classroom instruction covers personal development, job readiness, money management, career and job-market information, and job-finding techniques.

Students earn academic credit and receive the minimum wage for the hours they are in training. They attend academic classes at their respective schools in the morning and occupational training at Wright-Patterson in the afternoon.

CO-OP G, Northglenn High School, 601 West 100th Place, Denver, Colo. 80221. *Contacts:* Greg Sand, Richard White.

Co-op G was developed for students who have not been successful in traditional school programs. They receive vocational instruction through a cooperative arrangement between school and employer, while taking some academic classes at school. Classroom topics include job-acquisition skills, work habits, basic job skills, consumer survival skills, and career exploration and testing.

Requisites for admission to the program are a recommendation from a counselor or administrator and a personal interview with the Co-op G staff.

SELECT EMPLOYMENT TRAINEE PROGRAM, Pittsburgh Public Schools, 341 South Bellefield Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa. 15213. *Contact:* Fred A. Monaco.

The Select Employment Trainee Program (SET) is a vocational education plan for students who are academically and/or economically disadvantaged, for whom typical educational approaches have not been successful, and who have experienced difficulty in obtaining satisfactory employment.

A noteworthy feature of SET is its skill-centered vocational component, which provides economically disadvantaged young people enrolled in its skill-centered courses with a measure of financial support. These students are placed in jobs that are related to their occupational course of study. Before such placement is made a student must complete a program of intensive pre-work preparation.

Once on a job, the student returns to the school's skill-center classes on the first and third Mondays of each month for career, skill, and related instruction. For the duration of his or her job assignment, the student is supervised by both the employer and an SET staff member.

School credit is awarded for successful work experience. Since its inception in 1971, approximately 4,000 students from Pittsburgh's 13 high schools and qualifying parochial schools have been helped.

From a Different Mold

Vocational education provisions for high school students with special educational and economic disadvantages are usually of the three types just discussed. But secondary schools and school districts do make other services available in an effort to reach young people for whom the three, alone or in combination, are not quite suitable. Furthermore, while most occupation-related education for disadvantaged students is offered at the senior high school level, junior high schools have also been developing learning activities appropriate at that level.

Unfortunately, there is space enough for only two examples of other kinds of services.

Exempli Gratia

MULTI-OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION PROJECT, Broome/Tioga BOCES, Upper Glenwood Rd., Binghamton, N.Y. 13905. *Contact:* Michael J. Kost, director.

The Multi-Occupational Education Project provides occupational exploration, supportive reading and mathematics computer-assisted instruction, and intensive counseling to junior high school students who have special needs. The project connects vocational exploration experiences in several occupational areas with performance objectives in language arts, reading, and functional mathematics. Participation in the program has grown from 60 youngsters in 1974 to 120 in 1984.

THE WORKPLACE AND THE VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT CENTER, Cape Cod Regional Vocational Technical High School, Pleasant Lake Ave., Harwich, Mass. 02645. *Contact:* Marcia Hekking, student services coordinator.

Cape Cod Tech, a full-time, 4-year vocational high school, currently enrolls approximately 725 students who live in the 12 towns on the Outer Cape that make up the school district. From its founding about 10 years ago, the school has maintained an open-door admissions policy and has made a conscientious effort to provide an exemplary range of educational and other services for students who have special learning needs that policy attracts.

But, in addition to what it does for its own disadvantaged pupils, Cape Cod Tech plans and administers but does not fund, two occupation-related programs for young people living in its 12-town district enrolled in or dropped out from the district's high schools.

The Workplace, the local name for an extended-day program, is a collaborative effort by Cape Cod Tech and its supporting school districts to provide concentrated skills training in a few occupational clusters that appear to have the most promise for successful job placement in the area for young people with learning disabilities or social maladjustment problems which create serious handicaps to gainful employment. This year's clusters are building maintenance, culinary arts, and health aides.

Workplace participants are selected from those students referred by one of the high schools or by a social agency. After an extended diagnostic period, a student spends time in each of the job clusters while working with a counselor to develop an employability plan.

The Vocational Assessment Center was established in 1979 to meet a growing local demand for an inexpensive but comprehensive occupational evaluation system adapted to special-needs junior and senior high school students. Most referrals come from school counselors and psychologists and from rehabilitation specialists. Individuals enrolled in the program usually attend for five days, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. In that time participants are given a variety of interest, aptitude, and skills tests, including several hands-on work samples.

At the conclusion of the program, all finished work, test scores, and general observations are combined in a final report, which also contains recommendations about future training and/or employment.

In the Days Ahead

What does the future hold for the vocational education of disadvantaged youth? The answer to this question is neither simple nor readily available. The Vocational Act of 1963 (as amended in 1976) is currently in the process of reauthorization. As the reauthorization process continues in the present budget-cutting atmosphere any cuts made will have at most minimal impact on vocational programs for young people with special needs.

In anticipation of the reauthorization, the American Vocational Association (AVA) conducted a two-year study which, among other things, involved discussions with leaders in business, industry, labor, and government, and with academic specialists about the effects of vocational education policies. That study and its recommendations are reported in *A Framework for the Reauthorization of the Vocational Education Act of 1963* (Wircenski, 1982).

This AVA report recommends strengthening federal support for youth with special needs in several specific areas, including:

- Outreach, diagnostic assessment, and career-planning services
- Special services to assist in transition from education to work and in subsequent work adjustment and retraining
- Improving instructional capacity for support and services for young people with special needs.

Our concern at the moment focuses on the continuation of adequate funding to maintain the vocational programs for disadvantaged students that have been developed in the last 15 years or more, and rightfully so. At the same time, it must be recognized that we are still far from having found all the "best answers" for providing suitable occupational training for young people with special needs. Time, energy, and some money should be reserved in every school's budget for searching for still more of those "best answers."

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Kudos

This *Curriculum Report* was prepared by Jerry Wircenski, a member of the faculty of the Division of Occupational and Vocational Studies at the Pennsylvania State University and editor of the *Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*.

Curriculum Report is a bi-monthly publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Dr., Reston, Va. 22091. Annual subscription rate of $4 is included in the dues of NASSP. Individual copies, $1; 2-10 copies, 85¢ each; 11-99 copies, 75¢ each; 100 or more, 60¢ each. *Payment must accompany orders of $15 or less.*

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